

# State Agency Promising Practice

2007

TOPIC:  
Collaboration

## The Tennessee Employment Consortium (TEC): A Statewide Collaboration for Change

*By Jean Winsor*

### Background

The Tennessee Employment Consortium (TEC) is a statewide organization focused on increasing the number of Tennesseans in integrated employment. The consortium comprises volunteers from the state's Division of Mental Retardation Services (DMRS) and Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, the ARC of Tennessee, the Center on Disability and Employment at the University of Tennessee, community rehabilitation providers (CRPs), family members, and other stakeholders. TEC's ability to organize collaborative activities across state agencies, advocacy organizations, and CRPs has played an important role in increasing integrated employment outcomes.

### Implementation

In the late 1990s, Tennessee began a targeted effort to increase the number of people served by DMRS who live and work in the community. Recognizing that the disability community was interested in strategic planning to increase integrated employment, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities offered DMRS a grant to increase employment outcomes. TEC was developed through these initial grant funds.

TEC began operations in July 2001, coordinating efforts across the state to increase employment outcomes for people served by DMRS. TEC functions on both a statewide and a regional level. The larger, statewide TEC serves as an umbrella organization to the three regional Employment Consortiums of Tennessee (East, Middle, and West).

Currently, TEC is jointly funded by the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, DMRS, and DRS, and has an annual operating budget of

\$150,000. TEC acts as a conduit through which money for integrated employment training and the development of the integrated employment service system flows. No part of its annual budget goes toward defraying operational costs at the state or regional level.

TEC focuses on identifying the barriers to integrated employment in Tennessee and developing and implementing interventions to promote change in the employment system. To support their guiding goal of increasing integrated employment outcomes, TEC has developed annual work plans to guide their progress as well as a state policy evaluation tool. The policy evaluation tool measures how well current and future state policies support DMRS's goal of integrated employment as the preferred day service outcome.

The evaluation tool also allows TEC to identify statewide opportunities for improvement and to enact programs for change. Two such programs are the Integrated Employment Incentive Grants and Project Income.

TEC has used incentive grants to directly influence integrated employment outcomes in the state. In 2005, the group funded stipends of \$1,000 per job placement. In fiscal year 2005, TEC set aside \$100,000 of its budget for these incentives. The stipends are available to any individual or group who assisted an individual who receives DMRS funding to obtain an integrated job. As conditions of receiving the stipend, the individual or group must have a signed Letter of Understanding for employment funding with DRS, and the individual for whom a stipend is being sought must be confirmed

**For the latest in this series, visit:**

[www.thinkwork.org/aie/ppsa](http://www.thinkwork.org/aie/ppsa)  
(state agency practices)

[www.thinkwork.org/aie/crp](http://www.thinkwork.org/aie/crp)  
(service provider practices)



as a successful closure by DRS. The goal of these requirements is to:

- » Emphasize the importance of working with both DMRS and DRS
- » Ensure a seamless transition between the two state agencies
- » Encourage CRPs to access inter-agency funding for integrated employment
- » CRPs have reported that the \$1,000 payment received from TEC per job placement has encouraged them to expand their integrated employment services to individuals with more significant needs.

TEC also focuses on disseminating success stories in integrated employment. In Spring 2006, the Tennessee Microboards Association, Inc., with funding from TEC, began conducting training for people with mental retardation and developmental disabilities (MR/DD) and their families around integrated employment. Project Income, a series of trainings written and presented by individuals with disabilities and their family members, use peer-to-peer education to communicate the economic and social benefits of integrated employment for people served by DMRS. Initial feedback from Project Income training participants indicates that sharing stories of employment success is having a positive impact on individual and family perceptions of integrated employment.

## Impact

One of TEC's most important functions is providing a regular opportunity at the state and regional levels for employment stakeholders to increase the number of Tennesseans in integrated employment. TEC members note that without a collaborative group such as TEC, any effort by state agencies to increase the number of integrated employment placements would have fallen short.

TEC is viewed as an extremely valuable channel of communication between the regional members of TEC and the regional groups and statewide leaders. Regional TEC membership provides a network of support at the grassroots level to those who provide integrated employment. Information regarding statewide employment opportunities and challenges flows to the regional groups from the statewide TEC. Conversely, information regarding recommendations for changes in state policy and practice returns to the statewide TEC from the regional groups. This exchange of information allows TEC to speak as a unified voice for change in Tennessee's integrated employment system.

## Suggestions for Replication

States interested in replicating TEC should consider the following:

- » Collaborating with multiple stakeholders
- » Operating on both a statewide and a regional level
- » Planning for and investing in change

**For more information on this practice  
contact [thinkwork@umb.edu](mailto:thinkwork@umb.edu)**



Promising Practices is an initiative of the Access to Integrated Employment Project, funded in part by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Administration on Community Living, US Department of Health and Human Services. Access to Integrated Employment is a project of ThinkWork! at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. ThinkWork! is a resource portal offering data, personal stories, and tools related to improving employment outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

**[www.ThinkWork.org](http://www.ThinkWork.org)**